

Remarks at a Luncheon for Hillary Clinton in Miami, Florida

October 3, 2000

Well, thank you very much for coming and for coming on such short notice, in this typically Florida sunny day. *[Laughter]* Actually, on the way over here, Chris, I was speculating about whether this beautiful pond of yours out here would come into the house if the rain came. *[Laughter]*

So I want to thank you. And thank you, Irene, for opening your home to me once again. And I want to thank Philip and Michael and Stuart and Alex and all the others who worked on this event today. I'll be quite brief. I hope you're all going to watch the debate tonight. I think it will go well.

This has been a very interesting election to me, because the American people have an unusual decision to make in every one of these Senate races and House races and in the White House, because things are going very well for the country. The economy is moving in the right direction; the society is moving in the right direction. In every major area of our national life, there has been substantial progress in the last 8 years.

And what the people of every State and the people of our Nation have to decide is, what do we intend to make of this moment? And it's very interesting to me that the political rhetoric of our friends in the other party has changed rather dramatically, so they're now arguing over whether they or we are the real new thing, instead of whether we should take some big move to the right, which was their preferred line of rhetoric until the voters decisively rejected it over and over again.

And I can just tell you, I see this everywhere. But there are these big issues out there. Are we going to have a tax cut we can afford, that will permit us to save Social Security and Medicare for the baby boom generation, continue to invest in the education of the largest number of children in American history in our schools, and meet our responsibilities to the future by paying down the debt? Or are we going to say, "Times are good. I want my mine now" and have a combination tax cut and Social Security privatization plan that will throw us back into deficits, raise interest rates, and get this country in

trouble? You listen and see if that's adequately debated tonight.

I am telling you, I've spent a lot—I think that I have earned the right to make comments about the state of the American economy. I believe I have. And people ask me all the time, "Well, it's amazing what's happened here. What great new innovation did you bring to economic policymaking?" And I always smile and say, "Arithmetic." *[Laughter]*

I remember back in '92, when the then-Presidential candidate, George Bush, used to refer to me in disparaging terms as the Governor of a small southern State. Remember that, when he used to say that? I was so naive, I thought it was a compliment. *[Laughter]* And I still do. *[Laughter]*

But I knew something about arithmetic and not having rosy scenarios and not pretending money was there that was wasn't. So we brought arithmetic back and made a lot of people mad doing it. In 1993 I had an economic plan that raised taxes and cut spending so that it displeased everyone, but it got rid of the deficit. This year we had a surplus of \$230 billion, instead of the deficit of \$290 billion I inherited. When I leave office, we will have actually paid the national debt down by \$360 billion. That's worth about \$2,000 a year on a home mortgage, average home mortgage. It's stunning. So all I can tell you is, I think that this is a big issue. It's a big issue in the New York Senate race. It's a big issue in the national Presidential race.

Second thing I think is a big issue is health care. And we're having this huge debate which I think has been muddled—our friends in the Republican Party have desperately tried to muddy up the debate over this Medicare prescription drug issue. Look, here's the deal: The pharmaceutical companies, mostly Americans, but sometimes the Europeans, have helped to develop drugs that lengthen and improve the quality of life. Everybody knows that. The older you live, the older you get, the more likely you are to need medicine. Everybody knows that, right?

If you get to be 65 in America, you have a life expectancy of over 82 years, the longest in the world. Everybody knows that. What

a lot of people don't know is that more than half the people in this country who are over 65 cannot afford the medicine that their doctors prescribe for them, to either lengthen or improve the quality of their life.

So the question is, what are we going to do about it? For the most of the time when I was around here, our friends in the other party said nothing. At one time we had a chance to give drugs, at least, to poor people, when we had a deficit, and they said no. So now we've got a surplus, and our position is, led by the Vice President and Hillary and others, is that we ought to have a Medicare-based prescription drug benefit that goes to everyone who needs it; that the poorest people ought to get it for free, and others ought to pay in proportion to their ability to pay a little bit but that we ought to provide it to everyone who needs it.

Their position is that we ought to subsidize the cost for up to 150 percent of the poverty rate, after which people ought to buy insurance. And their position is, therefore, with heavy money from the drug companies to attack our position as being a huge expansion of big Government. Now here are the facts. Did you ever follow this debate and wonder what's really going on? It's hard to figure out what's really going on, right? Like why in the wide world would they be against people getting these drug benefits?

Over half the people who can't afford their drug prescriptions have incomes above 150 percent of the poverty line, which is about, as I remember, it's about \$16,000 for a couple or something. Hardly a king's ransom. Now, why would they be against this? And why would they call it a big Government program, since Medicare is Government financing of private medicine, right? That's what we propose, public financing of private medicine. That's what Medicare is. It has an administrative cost of 1½ percent, as compared with an average administrative cost in private health insurance companies of about 12 percent, 14 percent. It is not big Government. It's private medicine financed by the American people.

Now, why are they for what they're for, and why are we for what we're for? Here's the problem. You see all these stories about people going to Canada to buy drugs, and

now we may pass legislation which says that you can—that our pharmacies in America can re-import drugs from Canada, made in America, and sell them cheaper. Do you ever wonder what that's about? Here's what that's about.

We are blessed to have these pharmaceutical companies in America. They do great things. They hire tens of thousands of people and give them great jobs. They uncover medical miracles. It costs a lot of money to develop these drugs, and then they spend a whole lot of money to advertise them, once they develop them, while they're still brand named, before they become generic. And every other place they would like to sell their drugs has price controls, which means they have to recover from Americans only, 100 percent of the cost of developing the drug and advertising the drug.

Once they do that, it then becomes profitable for them to sell the same drug a lot cheaper in Canada or Europe. Now, they are afraid, the drug companies are, if all the seniors in the country can get their drugs through Medicare, that Medicare as a big buyer will acquire so much power in the market, we can buy drugs for our seniors made in America almost as cheaply as seniors in Canada can buy drugs made in America. And they don't want that to happen. Why? Because they're afraid they can't recover all their costs and their profits.

Now, they have a legitimate problem, because they labor under price controls in Europe. But the answer to their problem is not to keep seniors in Florida and throughout the United States away from the medicine they need to lengthen their lives. That's what this whole thing is about. You're never going to read that in a newspaper. That is what this is about. That's why the drug companies are putting millions and millions of dollars into the Republican campaigns from President on down.

Now, I'm not demonizing them. I'm glad there are American companies. I'm glad we've got them in our country. I understand they've got a problem because there are price controls in Europe and Canada and other places. But their idea is, it is an acceptable price to pay to maintain the status quo to

keep the senior citizens of this country without the medicine they need, and they're wrong about that. The Republicans are with them, and Al Gore, Hillary, and the other Democrats are with the people of this country, and I think we're right about it.

What I would do, if I were still in office, I'd go to them and say, "Look, this is not a way to solve your problems. Sticking it to the American senior citizens is not a legitimate way to solve your problem." This insurance deal is phony. Let me just tell you—I've got to say something nice about the health insurance companies, after all the fights I've had with them.

The health insurance companies, to be absolutely fair to them, told the Republicans from the get-go their idea would not work. They told them that they could not write an insurance policy that people could afford to pay the premiums on that would provide adequate drug coverage. They told them that.

Nevada, the State of Nevada, a small place, a laboratory of democracy—that's what our Founders said the State should be—passed the Republican plan. You know how many insurance companies have offered the insurance to buy the drugs? Zero. We've got some State legislators here. Ask them. Zero; not one. Why? Because it doesn't work economically for them. And they're not going to do it.

So this really comes down to the fact that the Republicans would help a few of our seniors, because we've moved the debate so far, and they don't want to be out there three sheets to the wind lost in it. But they don't want to help all of them, because they're afraid that if Medicare can buy drugs for seniors in the private marketplace, they will have so much market power, they'll get the price down, and it will cut their profit margins because they can't make up any of the cost of production in Europe or Canada.

My view is, let's take care of the American citizens, and then the drug companies will find a way to get all the rest of us to help solve their problem. We'll find a way to solve their problem. They're not going anywhere, and they're not going broke. And I'm proud they're in America, and I'm proud of what they do. I'm not demonizing them, but they're wrong about this. Their idea is, the

only way to maintain their profit margins is to keep the American people from making sure the senior citizens of this country have the medicine they need. They're wrong about it. Let's solve their problem once we fix the health care needs of the seniors. This is a huge issue.

Same thing on the Patients' Bill of Rights. Health insurance companies don't want it because every now and then they'll have a big settlement when somebody gets the shaft. Well, that's the whole point of protecting people. But even the Republicans admit it will cost less than \$2 a month per premium, per health insurance premium—less than \$2 a month to have the protections of the Patients' Bill of Rights. You get to see a specialist if your doctor says so. If you've got a doctor for cancer treatment or an obstetrician and you're pregnant and you change jobs before the treatment is over, you get to keep your doctor. If you get hit by a car going out of here, you get to go to the nearest emergency room. You don't have to pass up three other hospitals to get to the emergency room 40 miles away that your health care plan covers. If you get hurt, you get to sue. Otherwise the Bill of Rights is just a bill of suggestions.

Now, that's what we say. They say it will add to the cost of health care. It will. I did it for the Federal Government. You know how much it cost us? I put in all these rights for everybody insured by the Federal Government—Medicare, Medicaid, the Federal employees—do you know how much it cost? One dollar a month. So they say—and even the Republicans admit it will cost less than \$2 a month. Now, would you spend \$1.80 a month to make sure that if one of the other people here at this event got hit by a car—God forbid—on the way out of here, could go to the nearest hospital? I would. And I think most Americans would.

Now, that's what this debate is about. And so the American people have got to decide. There are big differences on education. There are big differences on all these issues. And I want you to watch the debate tonight. And I thank you for helping Hillary. As you know, there's a lot of interests that would like to whip her, and I think half of them think it's their last chance at me. *[Laughter]*

But she's doing well. She did well in her debate. I'm immensely—I'm so proud of her. But it's very important that she not be outspent, three to one, on the way in.

In politics, you can get outspent. But you have to have enough to get your message out and to answer all the incoming fire. And you've helped make that possible today. And one thing I have learned is, every one of these Senate and House seats is important. This is not just important to me, although, obviously, it is. It's important to you and to the American people.

The last thing I'd like to say is, I took a little time today on the economy and on the Patients' Bill of Rights and on the drugs to make a point. The American people are very oriented toward the issues this year. They want to make an intelligent choice. Clarity of choice is our friend. I think our friends in the other party have moderated their rhetoric a lot from the Gingrich years, but a lot of their policies haven't changed all that much.

So in order for the American people to make the right decision, they need to be quite clear on what their choices are. And while most people are very issue-oriented, how many people do you know who could tell you the real difference in Gore's economic plan and Bush's; in Gore's position on Medicare drugs and Patients' Bill of Rights, and Bush's? It may be more important in Florida even than the senior issue and Gore's education plan and Bush's. I read the papers, and sometimes I see people writing about it who don't really understand what the differences are.

So the last thing I'd like to ask you—I thank you for helping Hillary. If you know anybody else who's not here and would want to help us in the last month, ask them. *[Laughter]* But after this debate tonight—every one of you knows people who don't come to events like this, who have never been to a political fundraiser, who have never been involved in public service.

I want to thank Buddy MacKay for being here, for doing such a good job. Let me just say, in his service as our Special Envoy to the Americas, we passed an historic Caribbean trade initiative, and we passed the sweeping plan to help Colombia, and the na-

tions bordering Colombia, to try to roll back the tide of the narcotraffickers and their relationship with others that are trying to bring down democracy in that country. So I'm very proud of him.

You all know people. Chris said that he had somebody minding the store, because he didn't like to come to political events. But you know people that are going to show up and vote on election day, because they're patriotic; they love their country; they think they ought to be there when the voting comes. But they'll never come to an event like this. Maybe they can't afford to come, maybe it doesn't interest them, but they will sure vote.

So the last thing I want to ask you is, you know, I think that the Clinton/Gore administration has done a good job for Florida. We moved the Southern Command here. We had the Summit of the Americas here, the first one in 30 years. We have worked very hard with all the affected interests to save the Everglades, and that's just the beginning. I think we've dealt well with all the natural disasters.

I just wish that you would do what you can, every day, to make sure people understand where we were in '92 and where we are today, what we've done in Florida, and what the real differences are. And I only dealt with two today, on health care and the economy, but as I said, I could have gone on about the environment and education and nuclear arms control, where the differences are breathtaking and, I think, very troubling—very important to our future.

So I ask you, do what you can. This is a close race. By the nature of things, if you look at all of American history, when you have this kind of setup, unless one candidate can preform reverse plastic surgery on another, the way George Bush did to Michael Dukakis in '88, these kinds of races tend to be quite close. But the Vice President and our party, we've got the record; we've got the ideas; we've got the issues. What we need is clarity, clarity. So please—please—go out and tell people that.

And the last point I want to make is this: There's an overriding philosophy behind everything that I've tried to do. I like the fact that there are more people than ever that

can afford to live in homes like this. But I also think the people that are catering this event ought to have the same chance to send their kids to college that Chris and Irene do, and Democrats believe that. We believe everybody counts; everybody has a role to play; and we all do better when we help each other.

So if you can get the issues out and that simple message, I think we'll have a good night on election night.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon hosts Chris and Irene Korge; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush; and former President George Bush and his opponent in the 1988 Presidential election, former Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts.

Statement on Congressional Action on a National Blood Alcohol Content Standard To Combat Drunk Driving

October 3, 2000

Congress took a courageous step today to save lives by keeping drunk drivers off the roads. This morning, House and Senate conferees approved a Transportation spending bill that includes a critical measure to help set a nationwide impaired driving standard of .08 blood alcohol content (BAC). This commonsense nationwide limit will save an estimated 500 lives a year and prevent thousands of injuries.

Our progress on .08 BAC marks a new milestone in our ongoing effort to crack down on drunk driving. It is the result of years of hard work by safety advocates across the country. I applaud Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the more than 400 young people visiting Washington today who have put a national spotlight on this critical safety measure. I also want to commend the tireless efforts and leadership of Senators Frank Lautenberg and Richard Shelby, Representatives Frank Wolf and Nita Lowey, as well as U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater. Today's remarkable achievement shows that when we work together, we can make America's streets and highways safer for all.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Conservation Appropriations

October 3, 2000

I am pleased by the bipartisan agreement approved by the House today providing guaranteed funding to protect critical lands across America. By doubling our conservation investment next year and guaranteeing even greater funding in the years ahead, this agreement is a major step toward ensuring communities the resources they need to protect their most precious lands—from neighborhood parks to threatened farmland to pristine coastlands.

While we had hoped for even more, the very real gains achieved in the Interior appropriations bill would not have been possible without the many conservation, wildlife, and recreation groups, and citizens around the country, who worked so hard to secure dedicated conservation funding. I commend the many Members of Congress who came together in a true bipartisan spirit to make this a national priority.

I also am pleased that the bill provides critical funding for cleaner water, energy security, Native Americans, and the arts, and that objectionable riders that threatened serious harm to our environment have been fixed or dropped.

A century ago President Theodore Roosevelt put America on the path of land stewardship. With this agreement, we enter a new century better prepared to honor and fulfill this vital conservation vision.

Telephone Remarks to a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Jupiter, Florida

October 3, 2000

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

The President. — on the tarmac at the Miami airport for over an hour, and the pilot said we still couldn't take off because of the heavy rains and winds. And I really looked forward to coming. I must say, I feel a little jinxed. Every time I come to Jupiter or try